STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 23 January 2024
Time: 6.00pm
Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair) (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), Stephen Booth, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Forhad Chowdhury, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Conor McGrath, Sarah Mead, Margaret Notley, Robin Parker CC, Carolina Veres and Anne Wells

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.05pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence and no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes

Noted.

3. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

Noted.

4. Stevenage Borough Council – Corporate Plan – Making Stevenage Even Better (2024 – 2027)

The Committee was advised that at the Executive meeting a question had been raised regarding the relatively low level of public response to the consultation on the draft document. The Strategic Director (RP) advised that the original consultation via the Residents Survey, the Tenants Survey and the Co-operative Neighbourhoods Resident Proptech Survey had produced over 3,000 responses. The additional 72 responses were as a result of the additional 6 week period of consultation which had taken place between 23

October and 4 December 2023, at the request of the Executive. The additional consultation had been done via the Chronicle, Social Media outlets as well as meetings with the voluntary sector and other partners.

Officers agreed to find out if local schools had been included in the consultation.

5. Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Setting and Rent Report 2024/25

Officers advised that the Executive had considered a report in respect of the final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and Rent Setting for 2024/25.

Officers gave the following answers/comments to a number of questions raised by Members:

- The proposed 7.7% increase to rents was a flat rate across all housing stock but was a combined increase of rent plus service charges;
- In comparison to the private sector, council rents were considerably lower. There was no available comparable information for Housing Association rent levels but it was noted that as Registered Providers, they were also governed by the same regulations as Councils;
- Affordable rents were calculated as a maximum of 80% of market rent;
- It was noted that the Office of National Statistics (ONS) gave a figure of 6.2% as an increase in private rents nationally.

6. Draft General Fund and Council Tax Settings 2024/2025

Officers advised that the Executive had considered a report in respect of the Council's draft General Fund, Council Tax Support Scheme and draft proposals for the 2024/25 Council Tax.

Members noted that officers were of the view that the provisional funding settlement was slightly better than what was expected. 2025/26 inflation figures would still be a pressure, however.

Officers gave the following answers/comments to a number of questions raised by Members:

- Although there was a cost for the engagement of a celebrity for Christmas events, last year's Christmas light switch on had been extremely popular;
- Within the Executive report, a full explanation had been given as to the 3% cap by the Government and the make-up of the proposed 2.99% increase;
- Members were pleased to note the changes to the fuel used by Council vehicles but requested that Officers consider the origins of the fuel as well as the type used;
- All options considered by the Council's Financial Security Group had been included in the report which detailed those options and the scoring levels achieved.

7. Draft Capital Strategy 2023/24 – 2028/2029

Officers advised that the Executive had considered a report in respect of the draft Capital Strategy for 2023/24 – 2028/29.

Officers gave the following answers/comments to a number of questions raised by Members:

- Officers reminded Members of the scoring rationale applied to budgets from zero – 'do not support' to 3 – high priority support.
- In relation to the North Road development, the remaining budget would be returned part to the HRA and part to the General Fund budget.

4 URGENT PART I DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.

2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7 PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

10. Part II Minutes – Executive – 13 December 2023

Noted.

11. Activity Proposals for Fairlands Valley Park Sailing Centre and Main Lake

The Culture, Leisure and Wellbeing Manager answered a number of Members' questions in respect of the report.

8 URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

9 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR